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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2625
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS FREETOWN 000173

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PERRY AND FIRST LADY KOROMA DISCUSS HEALTH IN
SIERRA LEONE

11. (U) Summary: Ambassador Perry visited Sierra Leone's First Lady at Mrs. Koroma's request on May 5 for a briefing on the First Lady's recent participation at the African First Ladies Health Summit in Los Angeles. Mrs. Koroma was overjoyed by the conference, convened by African Synergy and U.S. Doctors for Africa, claiming it was useful and engaging through to the end. The First Lady enthusiastically thanked Ambassador Perry for her role in getting Sierra Leone on the agenda at the conference, and was hopeful that her new connections in the U.S. would be able to help develop the health infrastructure of the country in the future. End Summary

12. (U) On May 5, Ambassador Perry visited First Lady Sia Koroma at the Presidential Lodge to be briefed on the First Lady's recent appearance at the African First Ladies Health Summit in Los Angeles. The star-struck Mrs. Koroma gushed while describing the celebrities surrounding the events, but also pragmatically highlighted some of the people and organizations her office hopes to follow-up with over the next few months. She noted that they would soon be sending out concept papers to US Doctors for Africa and others, and that they plan to work with a Sierra Leonean-American contact within the Department of Health and Human Services to maneuver through the USG maze to identify other interested donors. The First Lady also referred to a keen interest from Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church contingent who attended the Health Summit. The Saddleback Church has already committed to donating forty new beds and some de-worming medications for the Matru Hospital in Southern Sierra Leone. Ambassador Perry encouraged Mrs. Koroma to keep the embassy informed as she works to raise international awareness of the health situation in Sierra Leone in order to ensure the smooth facilitation of U.S.-based donations and/or programs.

13. (U) In addition to making U.S. contacts, Mrs. Koroma was excited to hear other success stories from other First Ladies around the continent. She appears eager to learn and collaborate with them in the future as she continues to engage in maternal and child health issues. The Health Summit seemed to have had an energizing effect on Mrs. Koroma and her team, adding momentum to an already ambitious strategy she has been attempting to implement since her husband took office in late 2007. Ambassador Perry encouraged the First Lady to continue this important agenda, since the Government of Sierra Leone cannot afford to forget about the health and service needs of the general population while they focus on political stability and economic development. She also informed Mrs. Koroma of USG programs such as the Center of Disease Control Lassa Fever Clinic renovations and our HIV/AIDS educational initiative with the Sierra Leone Military forces.

14. (U) Comment: It was delightful to see renewed energy in the First Lady's office, though also concerned by the apparent limit of her focus on faith-based initiatives. Mrs. Koroma, in an effort to follow along with the traditional tendencies of rural communities, is attempting to channel Christian-based and Muslim-based charities to predetermined locations, keeping them separate, but claiming to give each equal attention. This is somewhat contradicted by her obvious focus on the Matru Hospital, which she is actively promoting in order to create a state of the art hospital in the rural south of the country. While the focus is most likely well intentioned, it

could lead the administration to largely ignore other regions of the country, including Freetown where the bulk of the country's population lives. The First Lady may need more encouragement in the future to create an integrated plan with the Ministry of Health. We have been invited to visit the Matru hospital with Mrs. Koroma in the future and anticipate USG donations to hospitals in various parts of Sierra Leone through Defense Department assistance.

PERRY